

Pressed Flowers

Bianca Bowers



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Dedication

For Azuri and Ezra

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Death and Life

Paperfields Press, 2015

Death and Life is the first poetry book by Bianca Bowers, and includes poems and essays written between 1987 and 2013.

Dedicated to those who struggle in their youth, and autobiographical in nature, she invites you to take a voyage through various psychological, emotional, and spiritual experiences to discover why death is not isolated to physical loss, but extends to figurative deaths that arise from larger themes such as patriarchy, abuse, depression, love, exile, belonging, and identity.

“Death is the great disruptor. It thrusts us opposite life’s mirror, invites our truthful exploration, and reveals the naked truth from which rebirth is possible and we are free to reinvent ourselves anew.”

The Road of Life

The road of life
dark and quiet
beneath my feet
before morning breaks
when the air is thick with fog

Impenetrable are we

Street lights few
and far between
lit, fading, blackout
Intersections
forks, turns, bypasses
criss crossing, opening closing
Signposts missing
streets with no names...

The road of life
quietly lit beneath my feet
as morning breaks.

Smiling Bag

Here he comes
the man with the empty bag
your earthly name scribed in bold
across the black rubber of its lifeless skin, soon
the indifferent mist will hem your margins, soon
the carnation tinge that kisses your mortal cheeks
will turn anaemic, soon
Winter's snow will claim your hollow bones, soon
your humanity will be tamed beneath the zip
of a smiling bag

Here he is
the man with the brimming bag
the weight of your mortality decomposing
inside the lifeless rubber of its black skin
indifferent to the cold mist that hems your margins
carnations line parlour tables, and men's lapels
Winter's rigour mortis at its height
within your hollow bones
the weight of your humanity housed
beneath a timber frame

There he goes
the man with the empty bag
the remains of your humanity
a memory,

inside the black rubber of its slippery skin
the fugacious mist, evaporated
carnations sprout in the shadow of pale smiles
Winter retreats with changing conditions
your earthly name
etched in italics
across the bones of marbled stone.

Blue Butterfly

I don't remember her name
It was too common to recall
But I remember who she was
A blue butterfly
Markings on her wings
like teardrops
There was mysterious sadness
in her moon-shaped eyes
A sadness that drew me
A sadness I strangely related to
A sadness that enveloped
Her wings failed her
as she rested her chin
on the tip of the elephant
The elephant and the butterfly
The blue too bruised to flutter
The teardrops too heavy to soar
And though she is gone
Time is powerless
to smudge her memory
Her blue wings at peace
in my heart

I watched you die

I watched you die
under a baobab tree
your spirit rose and fell
like red dust on the dirt road.

Black cornrows
smiling, unnaturally
like a red gash across the sky.

Sobbing so intense
I couldn't catch my breath.
Palpitations descending,
as panic rose
from my toes to my head.

We held each other so tight
Clinging desperately
you slipping away,
life force
bleeding out, furiously.

My energy sapping away
like sticky syrup
leaking from the blue gum tree

Your last exhalations

clammy
on my tear-stained cheeks.

A honeysuckle stopped to see.
Her tiny body, hovered
over yours
momentarily.

And as her gentle wings
flapped
your eyes blinked
finality
and closed.

To Those I Have Left Behind

I know it's hard for you to understand why I have chosen to leave you all behind.

You feel frustrated, because you think if I held on a little longer

I would have made a turn, and seen a ray of light.

You feel guilty, because you didn't know you didn't see it coming.

You blame yourself for not trying hard enough, not persevering one more time.

But most of all, you feel pain.

A void in your heart, in the space I used to fill.

I want you to know, it is not your fault.

The blame lies with no-one.

Feel blessed for the time you have had with me, do not feel cheated for the time you have lost.

It is hard to understand why my soul passed into this world a short while

only to be taken so soon.

It seems cruel and unfair from where you're standing

but try to see it from mine...

I was born into a world that did not allow for a gentle, sensitive spirit as mine.

Your earthly world is cold and harsh

it continually tries to break the spirit.
I tried my best to beat it,
to harden myself like others
But my spirit wasn't made that way
It was easily broken
and after much battering and bruising
it simply broke in two.
I could not piece it back together
My soul yearned for the tranquility and gentleness
it was born into
My soul chose to give up the battle
and lead the way back home.

Do not think of me as gone, as being worse off than you,
for although my body has returned to dust
my spirit remains with you.

Do not look for me like you used to, for I will not be there.
Rather, look for me in the sun that rises in the morning
and sets in the evening
Look for me in the springtime flowers and autumn leaves
Listen for me in the nightingale's song,
the wind in the trees, and the roar of the ocean.

Listen to all I have told you.
I have passed from your world
and returned to another
I am no longer broken
I rest quietly in the warmth of the sun
and sleep peacefully
by the light of the moon.

Obsession

His obsession builds
like a wild storm
on the horizon
while I watch, helplessly

Thunder rattles
light flashes
as it draws near
filling my insides with dread
keeping my life
under perpetual nightfall

Hostage

She watches him from across the table
mouth moving
licentious words
escalating
piercing her flesh
like fangs
splitting ears
with his forked tongue
Sinful eyes undressing
innocence

Weakened,
by years of hostage
she counts the hands of despair
as her pink glow pales
Her weaponry of words fail
to deflect the vile flow
that inches closer.

His Sin

She suffers silently
Agonises so quietly
For his sin.

Her life tainted
Her innocence violated
For his sin.

Her past irrevocable
Her future inevitable
For his sin.

She stands alone
The choice not her own
For his sin.

Thought Tunnel

I slip inside the old thought tunnel
skin extinguished by darkness
falling prey to adolescent fears
struggling against the onslaught
of viscous gloom
that fills and floods
my body
breathing is for the bold
and the well-adjusted
the haves and the hordes
She invites me
into the cool echo
of dark familiarity
Attempts to coax me
into her throat
but she is wicked
She'll only let me drown
in her belly and spit me out
Slipping inside the old thought tunnel
too scared to surrender
to the cool echo of dark familiarity

Unlovable

Sometimes I empty myself
through my pen
until the ink runs dry
other times I deface the words
that I have written

I am invaded;
an interior frontier of melancholy
I vacated myself
and forgot my smile behind.
My oxidized edges,
hazardous
at ease in the space
between solitude and silence.
Waiting to be abducted,
by misery that possesses me.

Searching for a key
that may not exist.
Saline fills my veins
instead of blood
holding out my hand
in moments of weak trust
pulling it back
when I feel the pinch
of paranoia

the reminder that nobody
truly loves me.

Cul-de-sac connections -
I will not let them in,
like I did the others, who
trampled the gardens of solitude
with their work boots.
Saline leaks from my soul
with overwhelming self-loathing
not even those who conceived me
were capable of loving me -
yet love lives in me
it constantly tries to escape
but it is tainted,
tainted, it must be
for it is always returned,
like an unopened envelope.
Perhaps it is postage
I know nothing about...
nothing to do with the love
I send
perhaps it's the receivers
who conceal a love impediment.

Love,
an acquaintance, to be kept
at arms length.

Whatever the reason
unopened love buries my bones in a shallow grave
overshadows my soul
tears thoughts from my head,
like paper discarded
from the notepad on which I confess

Layers of skin, pared
to the dispassionate skeleton
that houses my restless spirit
Just like me
my love
is not of this world
it doesn't belong now,
nor will it ever
belong
for I
am unlovable.

Amplified Silence

Violence interrupted, disrupted
vandalised the skeleton of skin

Innocence abducted
without anaesthetic

Reborn in the perpetrator's shadow
a synthetic mutation that victimised itself

Decanted bottomless despair
swallowed promises of ecstasy

Chased the light of a soul down dark alleys
before it vanished in the blinking strobe

Hijacked by depression
Suicide in the passenger seat

Drove to the valley of graves
to dig 6 feet of repression

Buried the secret alive
each shovel of dirt amplified the silence

Perforated

The final alarm sounded in grey passageways
after a morning with G
Into the passenger seat I shrunk
Artificial sentiment competed for oxygen
inside her white knight.

I dwelled on passing omens - a convoy of hearses, a yard of
graves -
before we slipped from the N3 mouth
into the bowels of Little India.

Her white knight bleached the littered streets
Her sweaty hand steered me, like a rudder through the Gan-
ges,
through a parallel world of vibrance - red chillies and green
dunya smelling of earth and rain -
through a parallel world of difference - hustle and haggles and
shrines to Ganesh

We cut through textiles - turquoise, fuchsia,
sunflower and gold -
til we reached a room
as lifeless as my life
with furniture as threadbare as my soul
to meet a doctor with no oath

He shoved two strips of purple jewels
into my hand
and held up an index finger as instruction

My fingers clasped his untreated gift
Eyes fixated on the rows of relief, designed to feed my demons

Hours later
Alone again
Hijacked by hostile thoughts
I took one purple jewel after the next
and watched the perforated strips
fall
to the polished floor.

The Other Side

Horizontal

between the weight of two bodies

from the other side

A dark, hooded shadow awakens fearful curiosity

A woman's glittery outline reminds her of love

His icy fingers freeze her fleeting smile

Stop her questions in their tracks

His icy fingers close around her neck

permanent abduction

Hot, mortal danger surges like electricity

rushes from tip to top

Victory is his if she doesn't fight

Survival floods her body

giving her just enough strength

to claw and scratch her way

out of his icy grip

and into the warmth

of the glitter queen.

Insomnía

i watch his moped sail past
from my window over the berea
his smile as fresh as the
rainbow souvenir flag at his back
flapping like a ribbon in the hot, january air

i wait for the buzzer to sound
trembling finger poised to release
the gate to my prison
listen for the echo of his footsteps
up two flights of stairs

i stitch up my desolate loneliness
with a superficial smile
wipe the trace of black liquid
that stains my lips
to greet him with my insomnia

this will help you sleep
he kindly offers
then turns to leave
on my nod and smile
little does he know
that my insomnia is world-related
and nothing to do with sleep.

Answers

I force myself
through the doors of resurrection
head hung in shame
for my unforgivable choice

On bended knee,

I thank you

for rejecting me

I strain to hear you whisper
from your cross of torment
an answer to my afflictions

I search your book for directions
that will sweep me away
from the perilous edge
where I sway like a drunk

I beg you to slow the winds
that could sweep me off my feet
at any given time

I lift my head in defiance
and beg your explanation
for the powerless years of torment
I implore you to alleviate the nightmares
that refuse to relent
to play me a melody
that does not haunt
to clear the chaos

of thoughts
that clutter and cloud
to set fire to my impediments
and let them burn to cinders

I ask with sincerity
why did both my fathers desert me?

Forfeit

I must forfeit my life
uproot my poisoned feet
abandon my motherland

I must forfeit my possessions
but I am sentimental
I'm afraid my memories will bleed
with the loss of each page
that fills the books of my youthful hope;
a lifeline of words
that suspended my sadness.

Each and every one of those books
more brilliant than diamonds -
No
I will forfeit clothes for books
for I cannot forfeit Emily's words,
where I wandered those barren moors
breathlessly intoxicated by Heathcliff's raw
emotion

And what of the paintings?
Unearthed in my birthplace
amidst Sunday flea markets
paintings that hung like muses
on my art deco walls

And what of my first Klimt?
So utterly beloved.
What of these?
How am I to forfeit these things
that quicken my heart
and feed my soul?

I must forfeit my madness
by destroying my journals
lest they use my words against me...
My truth is too cluttered
for their minimalist world
My words too heavy to roll off their tongues
My thoughts too bellicose to entertain.

I must forfeit all of these things
for the actions that will forever
hang in my skeleton closet
the only price, my soul.

Motherland

I spent a lifetime in union with her
built strong foundations and anchored my roots
I wept tears of anguish for yesterday's sins
but smiled with hope for tomorrow's forgiveness.

I felt a traitor having left her
The one who holds the roots of my history
The one who keeps the secrets of the past
The one who has shaped my life thus far.

I am indebted to her always and forever
for nurturing my young life
for building my strength of character
for revealing the light and dark.

I have forsaken her for a place
I will never belong
But will always remain under her spell
Forever to be a child of my motherland.

Shipwreck

Violent waves subside
The wind turns in exile

A murmur-less ocean kneels
and bows its head
revealing the shipwreck
I left behind

Submerged in cool waters
A veneer of peace, from my secluded beach,
but the screaming gulls tell the truth...

I look down at my barnacled feet
Blue bottles trailing behind me;
the transparency of stranded jellyfish

Drowned ships cannot be floated
Shipwrecks belong underwater;
the best they offer is exploration.

Journey

I journey barefoot
through Mairangi sand
Pen and notebook
my saving grace

I meditate
beside the waveless Pacific
soothe scattered thoughts
that rasp in my head

I listen to the screams
of red-billed gulls
who voice their freedom
to the sky

I write and release
captive words
fill blank pages
like blood fills veins

I journey barefoot
pen poised
beside waveless waters
Listening
to voices of freedom
filling blank pages

with bloody words
that echo in captivity.

Jar of Secrets

I carried my jar of secrets
step by childhood step
through prickly clumps of wild grass
and filmy spider nets.

I dug my nails into my hand
step by blistered step
as I crossed the solar powered tar
and dunes of scorching sand.

I placed my jar of glass and tin
at her capricious feet
I offered her my broken body
and whispered my defeat.

I floated in her cool embrace
watched the ebony drift away
In her weightless world of love
I saw another way.

She ebbed and flowed toward my jar
of glass and secret sin
and released it back into the blue
from whence it did begin.

END OF SAMPLE

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A Selection of Poems

by

Bianca Bowers

